

How to “Embed” Career Services Into Academic Affairs

by Karen Andrews

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Placing experiential education professionals in academic departments can give career services a leg up on promoting experiential education to faculty and students.

It was the fall of 2006. My colleagues and I were sitting in Kennesaw State University’s (KSU) primary auditorium to hear our new president tell us his plans for the future. At the time I was head of a 10-person centralized office for a campus of 20,000 students. Our new president, Daniel Papp, spoke enthusiastically of the plans to move the university to the next level. Part of his plan was to emphasize the importance of experiential education (ExEd) to our students. He continued with his goal of making KSU the “experiential education” university for the University System of Georgia. To accomplish this goal he said that we should strive for a 10 percent increase in student participation in cooperative education and internships each year.

At the time, only two staff members were responsible for the ExEd program. Some of the academic departments had faculty assisting students with getting internships, but most departments believed ExEd wasn’t a high priority and that the Career Services Center (CSC) would handle those who had an interest. If KSU was going to become the “experiential education” university in the state, there was going to have to be a real culture change!

It’s funny how ideas come to us. I went home that evening and turned on the national news. At the time, the United States was heavily into the Iraqi War, but the U.S. economy had not yet fallen into the Great Recession. The anchor discussed “embedding,” a new method of reporting, in which the reporter would travel with the troops. An idea was born: If I could “embed” a career services ExEd professional physically in each of the academic departments to promote the idea of experiential education, the faculty and students would feel more comfortable with the ExEd professionals and perhaps accept that ExEd should be an essential part of their programs.

After discussion with my supervisor, Nancy King, and President Papp, we agreed to embed a single professional for ExEd purposes. (There are six colleges, but the president wanted proof that embedding would work before committing a significant number of staff and resources.)

In the fall of 2007, the first experiential education associate was placed in the College of Humanities and Social Science, which was selected because there was space for the associate in the building. The program was more successful than expected. The 33 percent increase in ExEd participation in the college surpassed Papp’s 10 percent goal, and the following year we added three more ExEd Associates to our staff. The next year, I created career teams which consisted of an associate director who is located in the central location and the embedded experiential education associate, thus giving the colleges their own career team directly meeting the needs of their majors.

The Ex Ed program has continued to grow over the years. The latest annual report shows a 48 percent increase in student participation in the past four years. During the 2013-2014 academic year, we surpassed the 2,000-

student participation mark. This figure reflects only those students who have registered for course credit for their co-op or internship. We know there are many more that do not register their experience for course credit. At graduation, more than 60 percent of our graduates state they have participated in some form of experiential education.

In addition, the embedding program yielded other important results. In 2012, the CSC conducted a survey of deans, department chairs, and ExEd faculty liaisons to find out what they thought of their career teams. The CSC survey of 115 professionals had an 86 percent response rate. Sixty percent of the respondents stated they referred students to their ExEd associate, while 77 percent said they had referred students to the CSC. In addition, 97 percent stated they found their assigned associate director to be helpful, and 91 percent believed the embedding program was helpful. It is possible this has contributed to the 77 to 80 percent of our graduates reporting that they have used career services by graduation.

Over the past several years, many of the colleges have remodeled their buildings to include an academic advising center for their programs. In each of the colleges except one, the deans made certain that an office was included for the ExEd associate. This has allowed career services to be an integral part of each college's advising program. When the academic advisers meet with students, they emphasize the importance of saving some credit hours for an ExEd experience.

It is important for career services professionals to get out of our offices and into the world that students and faculty live in. Administration, faculty, and parents are finally looking at what the career services office does as critical to students' successful outcome. We need to seize the opportunity because career services' time on center stage is now.

Karen Andrews has almost 40 years' experience in career development. She has worked in schools ranging from vocational proprietary schools to private liberal arts colleges to large state universities. Recently retired after 27 years as the executive director of career services at Kennesaw State University, where she oversaw a 16-member staff of a department voted most helpful of any KSU office by the students in a newspaper survey. She co-wrote a senior seminar textbook titled *The Complete Graduate*. Besides teaching freshmen and senior seminar courses, in 2014 Andrews created and co-taught the first sophomore career exploration course at KSU.